

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Welcome To The Assist
- 1 MI-Access Goes
Statewide Winter 2002
- 2 Notes from the MI-Access
Contractor
- 2 MI-Access Coordinators—
Who Are They and What
Do They Do?
- 3 First Annual District
MI-Access Coordinator/
Facilitator Conference
Scheduled
- 3 Important MI-Access Dates
- 3 Glossary
- 4 Bookmark these web sites



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Welcome To The Assist

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of *The Assist*, a newsletter designed to provide information on how to help students with disabilities gain greater access to and progress in the general curriculum.

The *Assist* will do that in four important ways. First, it will include articles, features, and tips on specific things you can do instructionally to help students better experience and benefit from the general curriculum.

Second, it will provide detailed information on Michigan's Educational Assessment System, particularly MI-Access, the state's new assessment for measuring the progress of students with disabilities. Articles will include information on how the assessment was developed, the project history, legal mandates, and implementation efforts.

Third, *The Assist* will help us obtain feedback from you. By using the e-mail address, mi-access@tasa.com, you can (1) provide us with comments, (2) suggest articles, and (3) share your own success stories. We want to involve you as much as possible in making this a useful two-way communication tool.

Finally, *The Assist* will regularly include resources—names, addresses, telephone numbers, online links, e-mail addresses, and so forth—through which you can obtain additional information on topics you find of interest.

The *Assist* will be published six times each year and is available in print or on the web at www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped. We hope you find this newsletter of assistance and, again, welcome to our first issue.

Peggy Dutcher
MI-Access Project Director

MI-Access Goes Statewide Winter 2002

By now, most educators have heard about, if not field-tested, Michigan's new alternate assessment called MI-Access. But many still wonder why the assessment is necessary.

One reason Michigan developed MI-Access was because of legal mandates requiring that all students—including those with disabilities—be included in state and district-wide assessments. The requirements can be found in numerous federal laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Title 1), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA).

How do those laws effect us? First, assessment is an integral aspect of educational accountability systems because it provides valuable information that can benefit individual students by measuring their progress against standards or evaluating programs. Because of the benefits that accrue as a result of assessment, if Michigan were to exempt students from assessments on the basis of disability, it would violate Section 504 and ADA.

Furthermore, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (34CFR§300.138) requires the inclusion of students with disabilities in both state and district-wide assessment systems. The legislation also requires that states and local districts, as appropriate, develop guidelines for participation so that students with disabilities can participate in state and district-wide assessments. In addition, IDEA requires that states develop an alternate assessment for those for whom the regular state assessments are inappropriate even with assessment accommodations.

It was primarily in response to this legislation that the Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE/EIS) began, in 1998, to develop the MI-Access (pronounced My Access) assessments. The assessments were constructed

continued on page 2

Notes from the MI-Access Contractor

First, an introduction...

We are Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates, Inc., better known as BETA, a subsidiary of Touchstone Applied Science Associates (TASA), Inc., located in Brewster, New York. We are in the business of providing custom test design and development for state departments of education and other large-scale assessment users.

In November 2000, the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services awarded BETA a contract to help the Department implement Phase 1 of MI-Access. It also contracted with BETA to assist with the development of the Phase 2 assessments, which focus on students with mild cognitive limitations and those who function as if they have such limitations. Although the original contract was to have ended June 30, 2003, we are happy to announce that it was recently extended through June 2006.

This is not the first time BETA has worked with the MDE. Our association with the state goes back at least 15 years when we worked on the MEAP Reading Test, and more recently, the MEAP High School Test.

"We are delighted to have this opportunity to work with the people in Michigan," says Mike Beck, President of BETA.

"This movement towards assessing all students' educational progress is an exciting trend nationwide, and one in which we are especially interested. We are also involved in alternate assessment work in Texas."

During the first year of MI-Access, BETA was involved with everything from producing, assembling and distributing assessment materials and collecting completed student observation sheets, to scanning, reporting and distributing assessment results.

"This project is an example of how the resources that BETA and TASA have to offer can combine to meet a client's needs," says Mike Beck. "The staff at TASA headquarters has a lot of experience dealing with the logistics of statewide assessment. They handle all the printing, distribution, and warehousing for the MI-Access program, and provide scoring and reporting services. This is actually the first major project we have worked on that combines the energies of BETA's development and psychometric team with TASA's test production and scoring capabilities."

BETA/TASA staff, under the leadership of Deby Turner, MI-Access Project Manager, are available should you need to contact them through the MI-Access Hotline (888-382-4246) or MI-Access email (mi-access@tasa.com).

They can answer questions about administering MI-Access, respond to requests for materials, and update you on the status of MI-Access results.

"The Winter 2001 implementation of MI-Access in selected districts has given us a kind of trial run," says Kathi Keeler, TASA Scoring Manager. "This year we processed student forms from about 170 districts. Next year we're looking forward to doing a lot more with the statewide implementation in place. We'll be ready!"

MI-Access Coordinators— Who Are They and What Do They Do?

For the 2001/2002 school year, each local and intermediate school district was asked to designate District and School MI-Access Coordinators. Some districts have opted to have their MEAP Coordinators also act as their MI-Access Coordinators since they were already responsible for managing the MEAP and their own district-wide assessments. Other districts, however, designated Coordinator responsibilities to the special education director/supervisor.

Following is a brief description of the roles and responsibilities of District and School MI-Access Coordinators.

The District MI-Access Coordinator is responsible for:

- receiving the MI-Access assessment materials from the MI-Access contractor;
- serving as the communication conduit between the school or district and the MI-Access Alternate Assessment Program and the MI-Access contractor (BETA/TASA);
- coordinating the ordering, distribution, collection, return and security of MI-Access assessment materials;
- providing School MI-Access Coordinators with information BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the assessment is administered, including the date by which all assessment materials must be returned to the District Coordinator to ensure timely shipping;
- ensuring accurate completion of all assessment forms; and
- disseminating all information received from the MI-Access contractor, the MI-Access Alternate Assessment Program, and The Assist to district and school staff (including administrators, curriculum directors, teachers, ancillary staff, and parents when appropriate).

The School MI-Access Coordinator is responsible for:

- receiving the MI-Access assessment materials from the District MI-Access Coordinator;
- serving as the communication conduit between the school and the District MI-Access Coordinator;
- coordinating the distribution, collection, return and security of MI-Access assessment materials;
- informing the District MI-Access Coordinator if there is a shortage of or missing materials;
- providing the assessment administrators (teachers) with information BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the assessment is administered;
- ensuring accurate completion of all assessment forms; and
- disseminating all information received from the MI-Access contractor, the MI-Access Alternate Assessment Program, and The Assist to district and school staff (including administrators, curriculum directors, teachers, ancillary staff, and parents when appropriate.)

MI-Access Goes Statewide Winter 2002

continued from page 1

through a rigorous process involving extensive input from Michigan stakeholders.

MI-Access is being implemented in two phases. Phase 1 assessments are designed for students (1) for whom the MEAP or MEAP with assessment accommodations is inappropriate; (2) who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP); and (3) who have severe or moderate cognitive limitations or function as if they have such limitations. This Phase will be implemented statewide

during winter 2002, and assessments will be administered once each year to students that are 9, 10, 13, 14, 17, and 18 years of age.

Phase 2 is currently under development and is focused on students with mild cognitive limitations. It is expected that the second phase will be implemented statewide in winter 2005. Under discussion for Phase 2 is whether to develop the assessments by age or grade level.

First Annual District MI-Access Coordinator/Facilitator Conference Scheduled

Now that you know the general roles and responsibilities of District and School MI-Access Coordinators, you probably have additional questions, such as: What exactly does the Coordinator do? What is AUEN and how does it relate to MI-Access? How do Coordinators and/or facilitators train teachers to administer MI-Access? And, what training materials are available to help them?

All of these questions and more will be answered at the first annual District MI-Access Coordinator/Facilitator Conference, scheduled for Thursday, November 8, 2001. The purpose of the conference is to provide information and training to District MI-Access Coordinators and designated facilitators related to administering the MI-Access assessments, including how to facilitate the training of teachers using the MI-Access training video and supplemental materials.

The 170 districts that administered the MI-Access assessments during winter 2001 piloted the MI-Access Training Video. Each teacher was asked to provide feedback on it as well as on the accompanying training

materials. Feedback from 385 teachers was returned. Overall, the video and materials were well received. The teacher feedback was reviewed by the Alternate Assessment Advisory Committee and based on teacher comments and suggestions, revisions and additions have been made for winter 2002.

One thing many teachers suggested is that the people providing the training—whether they are District MI-Access Coordinators or facilitators—be trained on how to use the video and materials. The District MI-Access Coordinator/Facilitator Conference is in response to that suggestion.

District MI-Access Coordinators will receive the newly revised MI-Access Training Video and materials around October 15, 2001. The number of training packets sent to each Coordinator will be based on the number of teachers he or she submits to the MI-Access Contractor at the end of August 2001.

Conference registration information will be distributed to all MI-Access District Coordinators at the beginning of 2001/2002 school year.



AUEN: Addressing Unique Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities is a tool designed to enable educators to align student performance expectations, the delivery of programs and services, and student assessment. The AUEN performance expectations were approved (1998) by the Michigan State Board of Education as a framework for developing the state's alternate assessment. It is also considered an extension of Michigan's Model Content Standards and is viewed as a means to allow students, with disabilities, to better access the opportunities and programs of the general curriculum.

IDEA: The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which describes and regulates educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It also requires that students with disabilities be included in statewide assessments.

MEAP: Michigan Educational Assessment Program which is used statewide to assess student performance in specific content areas. Its content is linked to the Michigan Model Content Standards of the Michigan Curriculum Framework.

MI-Access: Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program, which is intended for students for whom the MEAP, or the MEAP with accommodations, is inappropriate. It is based on observations of student performance during specific assessment activities. The assessment activities were developed from the performance expectations of the AUEN.

Michigan Curriculum Framework: The Michigan Board of Education and Michigan Department of Education approved resource intended to assist Michigan's schools design, implement and assess core content area curricula. One of the components is the Content Standards and Benchmarks, which are coded for reference, detailed for clarification, and organized by cluster levels of early elementary, elementary, later elementary, middle school and high school.

Important MI-Access Dates

Receive MI-Access Training
Videotape and Materials Week of October 15, 2001

MI-Access District Coordinator/
Facilitator Conference November 8, 2001

MI-Access Assessment Materials
Arrive in Districts Week of January 14, 2002

MI-Access Coordinator
Teleconference January 23, 2002

MI-Access Assessment
Window February 18 – March 29, 2002

Check it out!

The assessment component of the
Office of Special Education and Early
Intervention Services' Web Site

www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped

<http://www.ccsso.org/scass>
<http://www.ccsso.org/>
<http://www.colled.umn.edu/NCEO>
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERS/IDEA25th/>
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/index.html>
<http://www.ideapracices.org>
<http://www.ncrel.org/>

Bookmark these web sites:



Michigan Department of Education
MI-Access, Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program
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This newsletter related to the assessment of students with disabilities is distributed to local and intermediate superintendents, directors of special education, MI-Access Coordinators, MEAP Coordinators, school principals, Parent Advisory Committees, and institutes of higher education. The Assist may also be downloaded from the Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services web site. www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped.